

## NASCAR drivers make pit stop at GTMO

Story by MC1 Robert Lamb, Public Affairs Office

NASCAR stock car racing fans are everywhere, including Guantanamo Bay. Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and other residents of Guantanamo Bay watched Joe Nemechek post a ninth-place finish at Saturday night's Bank of America 500 Nextel Cup race on television. Nemechek has scored three consecutive top-10 finishes at Lowe's Motor Speedway in North Carolina, and it was his best finish of this season.

Just hours after the race concluded, Nemechek, whose Cup team is sponsored by the U.S. Army, his mother Martha and Ashton Lewis Jr., driver of a Busch Series team sponsored by the Marines, flew to GTMO in a private jet-plane to take part in the NEX Customer Appreciation Day celebration, visiting with servicemembers and residents.

"Joe is very enthusiastic about visiting troops," said Martha Nemechek.

After volunteering to come to GTMO, Nemechek said, "One thing I've learned driving the Army car is that troops, no matter where they're stationed, they follow NASCAR."

The military is represented by more than one car in the Nextel Cup and Busch series. In an effort to have more than one service represented during the visit, Nemechek brought along Lewis, the Team Marines driver, who has been one of the top competitors in the this year's series, and finished eighth in the 2004 NASCAR Busch Series point championship.

Representatives from Goodyear Tires, and an editor and photographer from NASCAR Scene, a weekly publication, also visited the station to give away racing memorabilia and to spread the word that NASCAR supports servicemembers and their families for the sacrifices they make in the war on terrorism.

"This has been a neat trip," said



Photo by MC1 Robert Lamb

***MAC(SW) Michael McClinton smiles early in the race, but before too long, NASCAR drivers Ashton Lewis and Joe Nemechek will pass him.***

Nemechek. "How many people get to go to Guantanamo Bay, the only base that's on communist soil? That's pretty cool, and I got to land my own plane here. That's just incredible, a once-in-a-lifetime deal."

Shortly after arriving in GTMO, the drivers headed over to the Camp America and visited with NASCAR fans at the Seaside Galley, visited the Northeast Gate, and had their photos taken with Marines at Marine Corps Security Force Company headquarters.

"I've met a lot of great Soldiers (and Sailors) here. This place is a vital part of our security," said Nemechek. "The only thing I knew about Guantanamo Bay was from what I had seen in movies. When you see it for real, it's beautiful — to go out and see the Northeast Gate and the fence that separates Communist Cuba from GTMO, and look across the way and there are Cuban military folks up on their posts looking back at you. I've learned a lot about GTMO today,"

After touring the station, and signing a

few autographs along the way, the two drivers arrived at MWR's 'Checkered Flag Raceway' for Joe's and Ashton's final race of the weekend. MAC(SW) Michael McClinton, NAVSTA Security Operations Chief, was the lucky driver to be chosen to go head to head with the two professional drivers.

"I'm a big NASCAR fan. Growing up

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Photo by MC1 Robert Lamb

***MAC(SW) Michael McClinton poses with NASCAR driver Joe Nemechek.***